What is claimed is:

1. A method by which a multimedia message is transcoded *en route* from a sending terminal (21) via a messaging server (22) to a receiving terminal (25) having limited multimedia capabilities, so as to be suitable for reception and presentation by the receiving terminal (25), the method characterized by:

a step (31) in which a user agent (21a) of the sending terminal (21) inserts, into the message, media characteristics of the message sufficient in detail to enable determining whether the message should be transcoded to accommodate multimedia capabilities of the receiving terminal (25); and

a step (33) in which the messaging server (22) reads the media characteristics and decides whether the message should be transcoded based only on the inserted media characteristics and on actual or assumed multimedia capabilities of the receiving terminal (25).

2. A method as in claim 1, further characterized in that the messaging server (22) sends the message to a transcoding server (24) if transcoding is needed, and the transcoding server (24) uses the inserted media characteristics to itself decide if transcoding is needed.

3. A method as in claim 1, further characterized in that the messaging server (22) sends the message to a transcoding server (24) if transcoding is needed, and the transcoding server (24) uses the inserted media characteristics to itself decide which parts of the message need transcoding.

4. A method as in claim 1, further characterized in that the messaging server (22) determines, from the inserted media characteristics, which parts of the message need transcoding and sends the message to a transcoding server (24) if transcoding is

needed for any message part, and includes in the message an
indication of which parts of the message need transcoding.

5. A method as in claim 1, further characterized in that the
messaging server (22) determines, from the inserted media
characteristics, which parts of the message need transcoding and
sends only those message parts requiring transcoding to a
transcoding server (24).

6. A method as in claim 1, further characterized by: a step (35)
in which transcoding is performed based on the inserted media
characteristics and the actual or assumed multimedia
capabilities of the receiving terminal (25), without performing
an analysis of the message to determine whether transcoding is
needed.

7. A method as in claim 6, wherein in the step (35) in which
transcoding is performed, the transcoding is performed without
also performing even an analysis to determine which parts of the
message need to be transcoded.

8. A method as in claim 1, wherein the user agent (21a) inserts
the media characteristics into a field in the header of the
message.

9. A method as in claim 1, wherein the user agent (21a) inserts
the media characteristics into a header field in the body of the
message.

10. A method as in claim 1, wherein the media characteristics
include image and video resolution, or number of frames and
frame rate of visual content, or sampling rate of audio content.

11. A sending terminal (21), adapted for sending a multimedia
message via a messaging server (22) to a receiving terminal (25)

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having limited multimedia capabilities, the sending terminal
(21) characterized by: a user agent (21a) for inserting, into
the message, media characteristics of the message sufficient in
detail to enable the messaging terminal to determine whether the
message should be transcoded based only on actual or assumed
multimedia capabilities of the receiving terminal and the
inserted media characteristics.

12. A messaging server (22), enhanced for determining whether to
transcode a multimedia message sent from a sending terminal (21)
to a receiving terminal (25) having limited multimedia
capabilities, the messaging server (22) characterized by: a
characteristics reader and analyzer (22a), responsive to the
message, for deciding whether the message should be transcoded
based only on comparing media characteristics inserted into the
message with actual or assumed multimedia capabilities of the
receiving terminal (25).

13. A system, comprising a sending terminal (21) and a messaging
server (22), both adapted to perform according to a method by
which a multimedia message is transcoded *en route* from the
sending terminal (21) via the messaging server (22) to a
receiving terminal (25) having limited multimedia capabilities,
so as to be suitable for reception or presentation by the
receiving terminal (25), the system characterized in that:

the sending terminal includes a user agent (21a) for
performing a step (31) of inserting, into the message, media
characteristics of the message sufficient in detail to enable
determining whether the message should be transcoded to
accommodate multimedia capabilities of the receiving terminal
(25); and

the messaging server (22) includes means (22a) for
performing a step (33) of reading the media characteristics
and deciding whether the message should be transcoded based

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only on the media characteristics and on actual or assumed
multimedia capabilities of the receiving terminal (25).

14. A system as in claim 13, further characterized in that: the
messaging server (22) also includes or has access to means for
5   performing a step (35) in which transcoding is performed based
on the inserted media characteristics and the actual or assumed
multimedia capabilities of the receiving terminal (25), without
performing an analysis of the message to determine media
characteristics of the message relevant to deciding whether
10   transcoding is needed.

15. A system as in claim 13, further comprising a transcoding
server (24), the system further characterized in that the
messaging server (22) is configured to send the message to the
transcoding server (24) if transcoding is needed, and the
15   transcoding server (24) is configured to use the inserted media
characteristics to itself decide if transcoding is needed.

16. A system as in claim 13, further comprising a transcoding
server (24), the system further characterized in that the
messaging server (22) is configured to send the message to the
20   transcoding server (24) if transcoding is needed, and the
transcoding server (24) is configured to use the inserted media
characteristics to itself decide which parts of the message need
transcoding.

17. A system as in claim 13, further comprising a transcoding
25   server (24), the system further characterized in that the
messaging server (22) is configured to determine, from the
inserted media characteristics, which parts of the message need
transcoding and to send the message to the transcoding server
(24) if transcoding is needed for any message part, and to
30   include in the message an indication of which parts of the
message need transcoding.

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18. A system as in claim 13, further comprising means for transcoding (22 24) the message, and further characterized in that the means for transcoding (22 24) is performed based on the inserted media characteristics and the actual or assumed
5   multimedia capabilities of the receiving terminal (25), without performing an analysis of the message to determine whether transcoding is needed.

19. A computer program product comprising: a computer readable storage structure embodying computer program code thereon for
10   execution by a computer processor in a sending terminal (21), said computer program code characterized in that it includes instructions for performing the steps of the method of claim 1 indicated as being performed by the sending terminal (21).

20. A computer program product comprising: a computer readable
15   storage structure embodying computer program code thereon for execution by a computer processor in a messaging server (22), said computer program code characterized in that it includes instructions for performing the steps of the method of claim 1 indicated as being performed by the messaging server (22).